HANDOUT: MEANINGFUL SERVICE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

CONCEPT DEFINITION	A successful service experience should engage young people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good. When young people have a role in improving society, working for social justice and caring for the environment, then they truly understand the concept of democracy. Students recognize how participation and the ability to respond to authentic needs improve the quality of life in the community and advocate for social change, which may lead to a lifelong ethic of service and civic engagement. Meaningful service also requires thorough planning of goals, resources, training, supervision, transportation, logistics and risk management. Meaningful/high quality service should: • Respond to an authentic community need; • Include community partners, those being served and youth participants in the design of the program to create a rich, meaningful dialogue; • Provide age-appropriate training to prepare students and other participants for success (i.e. individuals being served, facility information, procedures, etc.); and • Guarantee the service experience is designed to achieve significant benefits for students, community partners and community.
KEY ASPECTS	A critical aspect of meaningful service is to develop projects/programs which not only meet a community need, but clearly are connected to deep and meaningful learning and experiences. Everyone involved in the project should be able to see the power of the work being accomplished. To fail to see the meaning involved lessens the experience, and weakens not only the impact of service but also the learning of students.
STRENGTHS AS A DIFFERENTIATION PRACTICE	Meaningful service requires multi-faceted experiences. Projects/programs should reinforce that the communities and world in which we live are diverse and require each of our skills in order to thrive. When students are allowed to partner with community members who share their interests, skills, and passions; stronger and more meaningful opportunities exist. Students should be expected to determine not only what roles in the project they excel at, but also what role they need assistance with. If such a situation were to exist, a teacher would advance the civic strength of the student by linking them with a partner who could further support that youth's growth in that area.
ISSUES	Without strong discussion with community partners and teachers, it is unlikely that students will identify a project that clearly connects with curriculum and is meaningful to the community. It is important that individuals involved in the project ask, "is this project essential to the advancement of our community?" Further, it is essential that all partners discuss whether the project can reach toward a level of advocacy, not merely meeting a need but attempting to end it.
IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING	When service-learning projects exist at the advocacy level (rather than meeting an in-school need or volunteristic agenda) students recognize how important it is to learn. If they are to advance in their communities, students must see how they are required to have particular skill sets; the more that learning can be connected with these skills, the greater the likelihood that students will recognize the impact of their learning on their lives.
OTHER CRITICAL ASPECTS	To ensure that a project/program meets the criteria of "meaningful service," clearly identified knowledge, skills, and goals should be identified early on. The skills that are learned should be practiced in a variety of settings. The curricular connection should emphasize purposeful learning driven by the academic needs of the classroom and school. Civic engagement should ensure that community partners feel valued, involved, and appreciative of the service being performed. That youth have the chance to learn from others and see the value of their practices is essential.

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SELF-EVALUATION

The following evaluation should be completed by Service-Learning Advisory Boards, teachers, service-learning coordinators, community partners, and especially youth to determine how significant the service-learning project is to ensuring a powerful learning experience for students as well as a dynamic change for the community.

COMPLETED BY: _____   DATE: _____

	DONE	IN PROGRESS	NEED TO DO	DON'T KNOW
1. S.L.A.B. members spend time early in the project/program to verify the strength of the project by determining that a community need is met and that it is a powerful experience for all involved.				
2. The needs assessment process confirms that the project/program has the potential to transform a community rather than simply address an identified issue or meet a need.				
3. Community partners involved in the process have the skill sets and abilities to support the project/program by guiding students and youth in a way that supports their learning and civic advancement.				
4. Students can clarify early in the project/program about how academic requirements and enhanced by performing, presenting, and reflecting upon their service.				
5. S.L.A.B. members discuss how civic responsibility requires open conversations about democratic rights, the responsibilities of citizenship, and the expectations of living in a democratic community.				
6. The service emphasizes a community need that requires diverse community involvement, including those from areas of business, industry, leadership, schools, and families.				
7. Training is developed that ensures that students, community partners, and all S.L.A.B. members are prepared for deep and meaningful understanding of the service-learning need.				
8. Project successes and challenges are reflected upon as to their impact on the students' understanding of civic mindedness.				
9. Celebration ensures that the community has a greater awareness of the importance of the work performed and mentions the impact of Lean and Serve funds.				
10. Reflection involves discussions about the importance of civic engagement in the lives of democratic citizens and the importance of youth advocating for community change.				